

Zero Retries issue 0093 2023-04-07

Zero Retries is an independent newsletter about technological innovation in Amateur Radio. Zero Retries promotes Amateur Radio as (literally) a license to experiment with radio technology.

About Zero Retries

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Request To Send

I intend to rarely wade into the politics of US Amateur Radio here in Zero Retries. This column closes out my thoughts on the ARRL leadership issues regarding now-former ARRL Hudson Division Director / ARRL Board Member Ria Jairam N2RJ.

My ARRL Membership Decision

I've decided not to renew my ARRL membership. This decision is mostly symbolic as my latest renewal was for three years, thus my membership, and my access to ARRL periodicals, won't cease until late 2025.[1](#)

One reason I maintained my ARRL membership in recent years was to have a vote in choosing

the leadership of the ARRL Northwestern Division and to have at least some standing to comment on ARRL decisions such as the censure of ARRL Hudson Division Director / ARRL Board member Ria Jairam N2RJ as discussed in **Zero Retries 0082** Request to Send.

But now, with N2RJ (apparently) *deciding that [there was no point in continuing her position within ARRL leadership](#)*, it's laughable to think that *my* membership in ARRL, or commentary *I* would offer on ARRL matters has *any* impact.

My final reason for not renewing my ARRL membership is that my interest in ARRL's periodical content has largely dwindled to *meh*; there's very little content in ARRL periodicals these days that is Zero Retries Interesting².

While it wasn't a decision point in not renewing my ARRL membership, it was *telling* that I gifted a year of ARRL membership (and thus electronic access to ARRL's periodicals) to a young techie that had recently obtained their US Amateur Radio Technician license. Near the end of that year of membership, I checked in to see if access to the periodicals had been useful / interesting. The response was "*Thank You, but no, it wasn't that interesting or useful to me. Please don't spend the money on another year of that.*"

In lieu of continuing my membership in ARRL, I'm going to follow some guidance from Jeff Davis KE9V (a Zero Retries Pseudostaffer of long standing) and allocate my "ARRL non-renewal funds"³ to join (and support) some organizations (and content) that *are* Zero Retries Interesting:

- [AMSAT-NA and the AMSAT Journal](#); that KE9V is [Secretary of AMSAT-NA](#) speaks volumes to me⁴.
- [British Amateur Television Club \(BATC\) and CQ-TV](#)
- [G-QRP Club and SPRAT Magazine](#)
- And, of course, [TAPR](#).

Rationalizing Zero Retries

You'll undoubtedly note that there are *three* editions of Zero Retries published this week - **Zero Retries 0093**, **Zero Retries 0093 BEACON Edition**, and **Zero Retries 0093 YouTube Edition**. Yes, that is a bit much, and no, that's not sustainable, either from the content generation perspective, and the reader's perspective. Publishing these three editions in the same week was another experiment in solo publishing. Perhaps I'll tinker a bit more on such things, but it's likely that I'll soon resume publishing *one* edition of Zero Retires per week.

Steve Stroh N8GNJ

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AMATEUR RADIO DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

Logo courtesy of Amateur Radio Digital Communications

Ria Jairam N2RJ Joins ARDC Board of Directors

By Steve Stroh N8GNJ

*Despite the dateline of the ARDC press release below, this news appeared on the ARDC website on 2023-04-05, a few hours **after** I completed Request To Send, above. You'll just have to take my word for it 🤔 Consider this a brief toe-dip, not another "wade", into US Amateur Radio politics.*

[Ria Jairam, N2RJ, joins ARDC Board](#)

On April 3, 2023, Ria Jairam, N2RJ, joined the board of directors of Amateur Radio Digital Communications (ARDC).

Jairam has been a licensed amateur radio operator since 1997, after first having been licensed in her native Trinidad and Tobago. She has served on the boards of the American Radio Relay League (ARRL) and the ARRL Foundation. She is actively involved in amateur radio outreach and education through speaking at clubs and conventions, social media, her weekly radio show on WRMI shortwave radio and her YouTube channel. She holds a Bachelors of Science in Electrical Engineering (BSEE) from NYU Tandon School of Engineering, and currently works in software and systems development for the financial industry and design consulting for renewable energy and energy storage projects.

Jairam was inspired to join the ARDC board by former director, Bob McGwier, N4HY, who recommended her prior to his departure in December 2022. She notes, "[McGwier] once told me, 'You can change amateur radio forever with us.' After seeing what ARDC has done and is doing, I'm a believer. So I'm here to make that happen." Rosy Schechter, KJ7RYV, ARDC Executive Director, says of Jairam, "Ria is a powerful voice in amateur radio, and we are proud to have her join our team. She's definitely going to help us make great things happen."

In Zero Retries 0083 Request To Send, I said:

In the end, the fallout of that bad decision is going to hurt ARRL. Perhaps it will hurt minimally, or it may hurt severely — too soon to tell.

I'll put N2RJ *joining the ARDC Board of Directors* into the latter column.

This has... *interesting*... implications — all positive for ARDC and nothing positive that I can see for ARRL — ARRL's loss, ARDC's (considerable) gain. At minimum, this will make ARDC's interactions with ARRL, shall we say... "better informed".

N2RJ joining ARDC reduces, a little, the sting of the active, capable, highly technical Dr. Bob McGwier N4HY [resigning](#) from the ARDC Board of Directors.

To conclude, I'll return to a quote from ARRL CEO David Minster N2AA that I cited in Zero Retries 0092 where N2AA [espouses rhetoric about building diversity](#):

To change the look of amateur radio from a diversity perspective will take many years. Focusing — seriously focusing — on youth programs and STEM education outreach today is the only realistic future for amateur radio to replace the tens of thousands of hams who will leave the hobby in the coming decade.

My perspective on that in Zero Retries 0092:

Thus, in my opinion, the resignation of N2RJ from ARRL leadership is a *significant* loss to ARRL as a whole and its leadership in particular, because seeing N2RJ in a leadership role at the ARRL did provide some of that needed "see themselves represented".

Now they won't.

I'll amend that last sentence to:

Now they won't see themselves represented in ARRL leadership... *but they will see themselves represented in ARDC — in leadership, in staff, and in volunteers at ARDC.*

Recruiting N2RJ for the ARDC Board demonstrates *how* you build diversity in an organization. First, you have to *want* diversity (not just spout rhetoric), and second, you have to *work* at building diversity by *seeking out talented, capable, diverse individuals*. I'll imagine that when N2RJ was approached by ARDC about joining the ARDC Board, she looked at ARDC and saw herself represented there, at least in part.

...

As I saw N2RJ announcement on the [ARDC News and Updates page](#), the preceding story was [Rosy Visits ARRL HQ!](#) *That must have been one interesting visit!*

...

All of the politics aside, in the end, N2RJ joining the ARDC Board merely serves to strengthen the great work *already in progress* at ARDC. It will soon be time for another installment of **ARDC Notes** in Zero Retries, but in the meantime, see for yourselves how busy ARDC has already been in 2023 with a quick look at the [ARDC Grants page](#) to see the fourteen ARDC grants already awarded in 2023.

Godspeed Ria Jairam N2RJ, and the ARDC Board, Staff, and Volunteers for all the great work they're doing!

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Thoughts On Community Chat In Amateur Radio

By Steve Stroh N8GNJ

A story that you'll read in Zero Retries 0093 BEACON Edition [5](#) (that will publish a few minutes after this edition)...

Help Build a Wireless, Solar-powered Chat Network in Philadelphia

... kept rattling around in the back of my mind until I was finally able to tease out *why*.

I think why *that* story kept coming back into my thoughts is that it's evidence that radio technology ([LoRa](#) / [Chirp Spread Spectrum](#)) has evolved to the point that a non-technical user base (patrons of a bookstore / members of the community that don't necessarily have any technical background) can envision building a wireless wide area network, for the sole purpose of text chatting with other members of the community.

While simultaneously...

Amateur Radio has more radio technology available to it, and more spectrum available, and more unused airtime on our VHF / UHF bands... and yet we seem to be communicating less than ever between individual Amateur Radio Operators.

The future Philadelphia "no-license wireless wide area chat system" won't be unique. I've reported previously about [Austin Mesh](#):

Austin Mesh is a community group working to build a mesh network of solar-powered [meshtastic](#) radios in Austin. This network acts like a city-wide text messaging system. This allows people to send unencrypted group text messages to everyone on the network. Users can also send encrypted messages to any specific member. All of this happens without any external infrastructure - no power, no cell phone towers, no internet.

Undoubtedly there will be other such systems as Austin Mesh and "Philly Mesh" try to scale up and become more widely known. Such ad-hoc mesh networks may ultimately not scale... (or they might - we just don't know yet). But the cost of entry is so low, and the novelty, and potential utility, is so high, that *folks are going to try*.

To use a sports analogy, as digital communicators, Amateur Radio is, arguably, in danger of getting *lapped* by non-Amateur Radio communities and technologies in building *new* (and new technology) wireless digital networks.

To be fair, Amateur Radio does have Amateur Radio networks that, among other capabilities, can allow chatting amongst users:

- [\[North Carolina Packet\]](#) is presently a non-incorporated group in North Carolina. NCPACKET is building an educational, and fun, data network using hobbyist owned and operated data links. We are using packet-radio over ham-radio.
- The [HamWAN Puget Sound Data Ring](#) [Seattle, Washington, USA) has cells deployed at numerous wide-coverage sites. These sites are interconnected with 5 GHz modems and routed with OSPF, forming a redundant high-speed backbone to route traffic between sites and to the internet.
- Mount Baker Amateur Radio Club [Digital Group](#) [Bellingham, Washington, USA) uses the “[Fast Simple QSO \(fsq\)](#)” mode of the fldigi suite for text chatting with other Amateur Radio operators on a simplex frequency.
- [QO-100](#) is a satellite payload in geostationary orbit above the Eastern Hemisphere that provides coverage over all of Europe.
- [HAMNET](#) (*Highspeed Amateur radio **M**ultimedia **N**ETwork*) is an autonomous network based on wireless devices. A fully-independant Radio Amateur owned wireless internet so to speak. It covers many regions in Europe and is even now growing fast beyond its european border.
- **D-Star DD [High Speed Data] Repeaters** are operational in a number cities in the US and Canada.

These are just a few such networks; space doesn't permit a more comprehensive listing.

Thus there's no shortage of *technology* available in Amateur Radio to implement community chat systems. If the Amateur Radio community in your area doesn't have a wide area *radio* chat system... perhaps it's time to *get building*.

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Feedback Loop

Comments:

It's a delightful “problem” to have too many comments from Zero Retries 0092 and Zero Retries 0092 BEACON Edition to excerpt here. Thank you readers who commented - there was a lot of interesting discussion and viewpoints exchanged.

Feedback via email:

- **Re: Zero Retries 0092** — (In reference to the Talkpod A36 Plus being available in a Lime Green color as an option):

I would like lime green 😄 If [Amateur Radio] wants to compete with the youth, we are

bombarded with aesthetically pleasing products all day long, and that's what sells these days! From what I've seen, AR doesn't tend to care about aesthetics too much at present.

Thank you commenter... those of us having been involved with Amateur Radio for a long time are, I guess, just used to... basic... (no) color options. We (and especially Amateur Radio vendors) really need to hear perspectives like yours about such things.

If you provide feedback via email, I may excerpt your feedback or include it in full. Unless you specifically grant me permission to include your name, I won't do so. Feedback may be lightly edited for clarity.

Join the *Fun* on Amateur Radio

If you're not yet licensed as an Amateur Radio Operator, and would like to join the fun by *literally having a license to experiment with radio technology*, check out **Join the Fun on Amateur Radio** for some pointers.

Zero Retries Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) — In development 2023-02.

Closing the Channel

In its mission to highlight technological innovation in Amateur Radio, promote Amateur Radio to techies as a literal license to experiment with radio technology, and make Amateur Radio more relevant to society in the 2020s and beyond, Zero Retries is published via email and web, and is available to everyone at no cost. Zero Retries is proud *not to participate* in the Amateur Radio Publishing Industrial Complex, which hides Amateur Radio content behind paywalls.

My ongoing *Thanks* to:

- Tina Stroh KD7WSF for, well, *everything*!
- **Pseudostaffers** that write about about “Zero Retries Interesting” items on their blogs that I don't spot:
 - [Dan Romanchik KB6NU](#)
 - [Jeff Davis KE9V](#)
- **Newsletters** that regularly feature Zero Retries Interesting content:
 - [Amateur Radio Weekly](#) by Cale Mooth K4HCK is a weekly anthology of links to interesting Amateur Radio stories.
 - [Experimental Radio News](#) by Bennet Z. Kobb AK4AV discusses (in detail) Experimental (Part 5) licenses issued by the US FCC.
 - Other Substack Amateur Radio newsletters recommended by Zero Retries.

- **YouTUBE channels** that regularly feature Zero Retries Interesting content:
 - [HB9BLA Wireless](#) by Andreas Spiess HB9BLA
 - [KM6LYW Radio](#) by Craig Lamparter KM6LY (home of the [DigiPi project](#))
 - [Modern Ham](#) by Billy Penley KN4MKB
 - [Tech Minds](#) by Matthew Miller M0DQW
- The [Substack email publishing platform](#) makes Zero Retries possible. I recommend it for publishing newsletters.

If you're reading this issue on the web and you'd like to see Zero Retries in your email Inbox every Friday afternoon, just click below to join ~~100~~ ~~200~~ ~~300~~ ~~400~~ ~~500~~ ~~600~~ 700+ other readers:

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If you're a fellow smart person that uses **RSS**, there *is* an **RSS feed for Zero Retries**.

Zero Retries (N8GNJ) is on Mastodon — n8gnj@mastodon.radio — just click:

[Zero Retries / N8GNJ on Mastodon](#)

Email issues of Zero Retries are “instrumented” by [Substack](#) to gather basic statistics about opens, clicking links, etc.

More bits from Steve Stroh N8GNJ:

- [SuperPacket blog](#) — *Discussing new generations of Amateur Radio Data Communications — beyond Packet Radio (a precursor to Zero Retries)*
- [N8GNJ blog](#) — *Amateur Radio Station N8GNJ and the mad science experiments at N8GNJ Labs — Bellingham, Washington, USA*

Thanks for reading!

Steve Stroh N8GNJ / WRPS598 (He / Him / His)

These bits were handcrafted (by a mere human, not an Artificial Intelligence bot) in beautiful Bellingham ([The City of Subdued Excitement](#)), Washington, USA.

2023-04-07

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Blanket permission granted for TAPR to use any Steve Stroh content for the TAPR Packet Status Register (PSR) newsletter (I owe them from way back).

[1](#)

In doing so, I'm in good company. Per the statistics cited in its [2021 Annual Report](#) there are 779,000 US Amateur Radio Operators, of which 158,000 are ARRL members. Thus ~80% of US Amateur Radio Operators *choose not to be members of ARRL*.

[2](#)

Perhaps coincidentally coinciding with the retirement of Steve Ford WB8IMY, who provided the only consistently Zero Retries Interesting content in QST.

[3](#)

nor renewing my CQ Amateur Radio digital edition subscription. Sorry CQ, but the sole Zero Retries Interesting content is the Digital ~~Dimension~~ *Connection* column by Don Rotolo N2IRZ, and *that's bimonthly*. **Update** - *Digital Dimension* was another former column in QST by Stan Horzempa WA1LOU that was Zero Retries Interesting.

[4](#)

AMSAT-NA had a rough patch a few years ago, but that now seems to be behind them.

[5](#)

It would have been more ideal to publish that article in this edition of Zero Retries for easy reference... but space constraints didn't allow it.